

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers January 18, 2005

NETS Feature

Detroit, the Automotive Capitol of the World Hosts International Auto Show

This week, the 2005 North American International Auto Show, one of the world's most prestigious automotive events, gave auto manufacturers from around the world the opportunity to reveal their production and concept vehicles, and for auto buffs to get a glimpse of the newest, hottest automotive trends.....much more:

<http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0501/12/C01-57819.htm>,
<http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0501/13/B01-58875.htm>, and
<http://www.techweb.com/wire/mobile/57700888>

Common Sense Solutions....to Intersection Safety Problems

The majority of serious injuries and deaths in Michigan occur on local roads. A workshop has been developed to provide a basic understanding of intersection safety problems, issues and liability, and the role they play in making local intersections safer and protecting organizations from litigation. An engineering background is NOT required. Workshops will be offered through August 2005. Workshops over the next month are scheduled to take place on 1/19/05 in Jackson at the Holiday Inn; 1/20/05 in Grand Rapids at the Crown Plaza; 2/23/05 in Kalamazoo and 2/24/05 in Ann Arbor. To register, call Michigan's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) at 906-487-2102. For more information on additional workshops being offered through August 2005 please link to:
<http://www.michiganltap.org/workshop/datesIntSafety.html>

Latest Traffic Safety News

Black Box Data Backs Up Trucker Facing Vehicular Homicide Allegations

Information retrieved from an event data recorder has cleared an Arkansas trucker arrested for striking and killing a police officer helping a stranded driver. Police reports claim that the trucker was speeding, had a poor driving record, and made no attempt to stop. Yet the trucker's girlfriend, who was riding as a passenger in the truck, claimed that the trucker wasn't speeding, attempted to avoid the other car, and hit the brakes. The trucker was charged with vehicular homicide and aggravated assault. However, information from the vehicle's event data recorder conflicted with police reports and confirmed the passenger's version of events. Read the article at
http://www.truckinginfo.com/news/news-detail.asp?news_id=53526&news_category_id=22

Study Finds Drowsy Doctors To Be Dangerous Drivers

A new study conducted by researchers at Harvard Medical School found that lack of sleep from very long shifts could make young doctors just as dangerous as alcohol-impaired drivers on the road. The study reports that doctors in training were more than twice as likely to be involved in a crash while driving home after working 24 hours or longer. In addition, the researchers concluded that after extended shifts, young doctors were about six times more likely to report a near-miss crash and that they sometimes fell asleep while driving. The results of the study were published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Read the full article at

http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2005/01/13/sleepy_doctors_pose_a_hazard_on_road/

Connecticut Prepares To Unveil e-Mail Alert Traffic System

The Connecticut Department of Transportation is expected to launch its new traffic alert system that notifies commuters via e-mail of traffic incidents and delays in the beginning of February. Under the new system, commuters will be able to sign up for the alerts at the state's DOT web site. A state map will be divided into four districts and motorists will be able to choose the region they travel most frequently. At no cost to them, commuters will be sent daily e-mails and real-time alerts to their computer detailing construction projects, traffic congestion, and other possible delays. Georgia and Virginia currently operate similar traffic alert systems. Read the full article at

<http://www.greenwichtime.com/news/local/scn-gt-traffic5jan09,0,5105069.story?coll=green-news-local-headlines>

Airbag Thefts Cost Insurers, Vehicle Owners

Each year, more than 75,000 airbags are stolen, costing insurers and vehicle owners at least \$50 million. Unactivated airbags are the size of two decks of cards and can be quickly stolen from the steering wheel or dash. Airbags typically retail for \$1,000, but can sell for \$200 on the black market. Auto parts shops sometimes reuse stolen airbags. Now, manufacturers are working to put tracking or ID numbers on air bags to make them less attractive to thieves. Read the full story at

http://www.fleet-central.com/vr/t_inside.cfm?action=news_pick&storyID=15189

Michelin Working On Airless Tire

Tire experts at Michelin are aiming to develop a tire that never goes flat.

The new design combines the function of both tires and wheels without using air, making it impossible to go flat. Known as "Tweels," this new concept is comprised of a hub, polyurethane spokes, a shear band, and a tread band. In addition to being immune to deflation, the Tweel is said to last two to three times longer than a standard radial tire. For more information visit

http://www.michelin.com/corporate/actualites/en/actu_affich.jsp?id=13730&lang=EN&codeRubrique=58

Employers Profit By Keeping An Eye On Mobile Employees

With the help of global positioning systems (GPS), employers are improving productivity and customer service, as well as keeping tabs on labor costs. These systems are usually fitted in vehicles, in cell phones, or other devices that workers carry on-the-job. The success of GPS has grown among businesses and government employers, particularly among businesses dispatching large numbers of service technicians, in the building trades, and for others whose workers span wide territory. Read the full article at <http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/business/10526745.htm>

Driver Attitudes Curb Traffic-Reducing Technology

While some experts claim that the technology exists to create driverless automobiles, an expert from the Intelligent Transportation Society of Pennsylvania says that drivers aren't ready to give up the control and freedom of their vehicle. As a result, many new automobile technologies are left waiting in the wings in Pennsylvania. Among them are a 511 cell phone calling system that provides real-time traffic updates, a 24/7 transportation management center that monitors traffic and updates message boards, and movable median barriers that change the flow of traffic based on rush hour traffic patterns. Read the full article at <http://www.cumberlink.com/articles/2005/01/09/news/news01.txt>

Houston Defends Method For Clearing Highways

The city of Houston's compulsory towing program has been praised on its ability to improve traffic safety and mobility, but some say it has gone too far. Officials in several metro areas have said that they will order a tow if a disabled vehicle is hazardous or blocks the flow of traffic, however in Houston, vehicles can automatically be towed, even if they are on the freeway shoulder, attended, or disabled during non-rush hours. In both New York and Los Angeles, home of some of the busiest roadways, motorists with disabled vehicles are able to avoid a tow if their vehicle is not blocking traffic. To date, a whopping 100 vehicles are being towed a day in Houston with drivers responsible for the \$75 tow fee. Meanwhile, developers of Houston's program say the numbers will decline, as more motorists will be prompted to ensure that their cars are roadworthy. Read the full article at <http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/metropolitan/2983173>

'Cellular Samaritans' Encouraged To Dial With Caution

A group of local EMTs and firefighters in Oregon are encouraging "Cellular Samaritans" to report all details and stay on the line as necessary when calling in a roadway incident. These emergency responders are finding that due to a lack of information many times they arrive at a scene to find an abandoned car or motorist fixing his/her car rather than an urgent situation. Additionally, many motorists calling to report a crash fail to give the location of the incident and do not leave their cell phone number. As soon as these calls come in, an emergency team is dispatched only to waste precious time searching for the scene. Read the full article at <http://www.gazettetimes.com/articles/2004/12/30/news/community/thuloc05.txt>

TRIB: Proper Tire Inflation Can Reduce Fuel Costs

The rising cost of fuel is quickly becoming one of the largest variable costs associated with fleet operations. To help fleets offset their costs, the Tire Retread Information Bureau (TRIB) has developed tips to help truckers cut fuel costs through proper tire maintenance. According to the agency, proper inflation and maintenance make tires last longer, are safer, and maximize fuel economy by reducing rolling resistance. For more information visit <http://www.retread.org/>

New Real-time Information System Expected To Reduce Traffic

A small tech company is hoping to speed travel for motorists nationwide with its introduction of the Real-Time Transportation Infrastructure Information System, which will allow vehicles to relay information on road conditions, weather problems, traffic jams, and route closures to state transportation departments, trucking businesses, as well as to other cars. The key to the system is a sensor that is mounted on vehicles to beam information to state and regional data centers through satellite systems. Motorists would be able to receive constantly updated information based on events happening in real time. The system is expected to hit markets in 2005. Read the full article at http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/dec2004/sb20041229_6032_sb040.htm

North Dakota Lawmaker Plans Bill Addressing Automobile Black Boxes

A state senator in North Dakota is making plans to introduce a bill that would alert drivers to the event data recorders (EDRs) that unbeknownst to many consumers are quickly becoming standard features in many vehicles. Only one state, California, requires sellers to disclose that vehicles come equipped with EDRs. The North Dakota legislator's bill would require sellers to disclose the presence of an EDR in a clear manner, and would ask that the data be defined as the owner's property—inaccessible to both the public and to insurance companies who could use it to assess insurance risk. The bill would also allow the owner to have the system disconnected. Read the full article at <http://www.grandforks.com/mld/grandforks/news/10518462.htm>

Nearly Half Of Police Officers' Deaths Are Traffic-Related In 2004

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and Concerns of Police Survivors reports that of the 154 officers killed in the line of duty last year, nearly half of them died in traffic-related incidents. Read the release at <http://www.nleomf.com/media/press/2004finalfatalities.htm>

Mass Transit Pays Off For Business Travelers

According to a recent article in USA Today, many business travelers are unaware of the cost savings attributed to using big cities' rail systems and do not use them as a means to get around. Many travelers say they are unable to understand them quickly or that crowds and dingy stations are deterring factors. Yet according to the article, the pay-off for travelers who do use rail systems can be substantial. Transit systems are often faster than a taxi, cheaper, and more reliable. Read the full article at http://www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2004-12-27-subway-usat_x.htm

New Pennsylvania Law To Assist Crash Investigators

New legislation in Pennsylvania gives crash investigators up to a year after a crash occurs to file summary charges. Previously, investigators had only 30 days to file traffic violations in connection with traffic crashes involving injury or death. Proponents say the new law gives law enforcement the necessary time to complete investigations of the most difficult crashes. Read the full article at http://www.truckflix.com/news_article.php?newsid=1878

Drivers Prefer Function Over Entertainment

As automakers continue to equip vehicles with a plethora of high-tech in-vehicle technologies, consumers continue to demonstrate their preference towards functionality rather than entertainment. More and more reports are finding that today's drivers want integration of functions rather than the reinvention of similar tools. For example, rather than having one cell phone for the car and one cell phone that they carry with them the rest of time, drivers want one cell phone that combines the advantages of both. They also want to take advantage of the Internet and its ability to offer real-time information on traffic and fuel availability along their intended route. Read the full article at <http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,1759,1749821,00.asp>

AAA Unveils Tool For Senior Drivers

AAA recently launched "AAA Roadwise Review: A Tool to Help Seniors Drive Safely Longer" during the January 2005 Transportation Research Board (TRB) meetings in Washington, DC. AAA worked with TransAnalytics to develop this home-based screening tool to assist seniors in identifying and addressing changes in the functional capabilities most associated with safe driving. The "AAA Roadwise Review" CD-Rom is designed to extend the safe driving years of seniors and to make a positive impact on senior mobility and safety. For more information visit <http://www.aaaworld.com/pages/articles.asp?id=354>

Ford Develops Intelligent Lane Departure Warning System

Ford Motor Company, in conjunction with researchers at the Volvo Safety Center, is in the process of developing a safety technology to warn drivers if their vehicle is wandering from its travel lane and applies the brakes if a crash is imminent. Ford's Lane Departure Warning, or Collision Mitigation by Braking (CMbB), is designed to recognize lane markings and a vehicle's lateral position to these lane markings. If the vehicle departs from a lane, it can provide visual, audible, or vibrating warnings to alert the driver. Sensors are used to gauge the likelihood of a crash and if a driver fails to act, the brakes are automatically applied. Read the full article at http://www.fleet-central.com/af/t_inside.cfm?action=news_pick&storyID=15214

Organization Warns Of On-The-Job Consequences To Off-The-Job Partying

J.J. Keller, a supplier of safety and compliance solutions, warns that an employee's off-the-job weekend consumption of drugs and alcohol has the potential to carry over into the workweek. While drug and alcohol detection periods vary from individual to individual, employees need to be reminded that their off-the-job behaviors may have on-the-job consequences. The organization points out that this is especially important to commercial drivers who may be putting their career on the line. For more information visit http://www.jjkeller.com/ideaoftheweek/ideal230.htm?action_code=89661

IIHS: Primary Seat Belt Laws Can Save 700 Lives Per Year

A new study conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that when states strengthen their seat belt laws from secondary enforcement to primary enforcement, driver death rates decline by an estimated 7 percent. Only 21 states and the District of Columbia have primary enforcement seat belt laws, meaning police may stop vehicles solely for violating seat belt laws. Research conducted by NHTSA in 2004 shows that belt use rates averaged 84 percent in primary states compared to 73 percent in secondary states. Read the release at http://www.iihs.org/news_releases/2005/pr011305.htm

Safety Activists Call On Feds To Address Speeding

A group of traffic safety activists and officials are calling on the federal government to organize a safety summit addressing a new crop of cars and advertising that they believe to be promoting speeding. According to the group, there are a growing number of cars equipped with high-powered engines and horsepower, as well as ads that emphasize speed. In response, NHTSA plans to sponsor a summit in Washington, DC this June that will include an international group of safety experts and activists, law enforcement personnel, and other government officials to explore ideas to reduce speeding. Read the full article at http://www.newsday.com/business/ny-bzfast0113_0,701106.story?coll=ny-business-headlines

New Study Gives Alcohol Ignition Locks Mixed Results

A new review conducted by the Cochrane Injuries Group examines the use of alcohol ignition interlock devices. Convicted alcohol-impaired drivers are often offered the choice of a standard punishment or an alcohol ignition lock to be fitted to their car for a fixed period of time. The review noted that while many offenders do not chose to use the interlock system, when it is used and fitted to the vehicle, it seems to reduce re-offending for both first time and repeat offenders. But the review also points out that there seems to be no long-term benefit after the interlock system has been removed. Source: Injury Prevention

News from USDOT

New Report Finds Phone Conversations Interfere With Driving

A new report conducted by NHTSA explored the effects of cellular phone conversations on driving and found that the phone tasks interfered with many driving-related functions, especially among older drivers. The findings were based on a simulated driving task. View the report's abstract at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/research/auditorytask/pages/TRD.html>

Cell Phone-Based Driver Log System Proposed To FMCSA

In response to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) call for comments on mandatory electronic on-board recorders, Nextel and Xora both petitioned the agency to allow companies to supply a system in which the driver logs are accessed via cell phones. The Nextel-Xora proposal is similar to the Werner Enterprises exemption. The system called Xora DOT Logs would



Federal Regulators Crack Down On Unsafe Auto Customizations

The auto body shop responsible for the customization of vehicles on MTV's "Pimp My Ride" was recently fined \$16,000 by federal regulators for removing front air bags to install video screens in the steering wheel. While NHTSA doesn't have jurisdiction over cars once they are made, it does have authority over tampering with safety equipment. Many states have laws against watching TV in the front seat, however many laws have not been updated to address DVDs. Meanwhile, over the last decade, annual spending on aftermarket car parts and accessories has doubled to \$28.9 billion annually. The fine is considered to be the first in what is expected to be a broader crackdown against auto customization shops.

Work/Life

Tips For Keeping Kids Safe In Cars

According to NHTSA, in 2002, nearly 500 children under the age of five were killed as a result of traffic crashes and the improper use of safety restraints. The agency says that if used properly child safety seats could reduce fatalities by as much as 71 percent. To help raise awareness, Nissan North America released a series of child seat safety tips. Read the full article at http://motortrend.com/features/news/112_news041222_childseat/

International Traffic Safety News

A Bug's Eye View May Prevent Traffic Crashes

A team of European scientists is aiming to save lives through the development of a crash avoidance system that mimics the unique visual attributes of locusts and flies. Locusts, which are known to travel in large swarms, avoid colliding with each other due to an early warning system in their brains, while flies possess an amazing ability to get out of the way of danger. When applied to vehicles, these attributes are said to allow drivers to be warned if another vehicle comes too close or if an obstacle represents a danger. Funded by IST with a completion date by the end of 2006, the "Locust Project" is based on a computer vision system for collision detection and is anticipated to be more effective and cheaper than existing technologies. Read the full article at <http://istresults.cordis.lu/index.cfm/section/news/Tpl/article/BrowsingType/Short%20Feature/ID/73595/highlights/Locust+Project>

UK Highways Agency Appoints 'Jambuster' To Alleviate Traffic

A "jambuster" supremo who will help drivers avoid traffic congestion has been appointed to the UK's Highways Agency. The primary function of the new position is to improve the quality of traffic information transmitted to motorists on major routes. Read the full story at <http://news.scotsman.com/latest.cfm?id=3958203>

Jamaica Struggles To Implement National Traffic Safety Plan

Deadly holiday traffic crashes on Jamaican roadways have raised questions about the status of the country's pending national road safety policy. Six years ago, the increasing number of road fatalities spurred the government to develop the National Road Safety Council charged with the responsibility of studying the problem and recommending solutions. The initiative produced a 30-page draft policy aimed at reducing traffic crashes and fatalities by 25 percent over the next four years. The draft is awaiting Cabinet approval so that it can be used as the basis for the development of a national road

safety program and action plan. However, sources indicate that lack of funding may be slowing progress. Read the full article at

http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20050108T190000-0500_72857_OBS_WHERE_IS_THE_NATIONAL_ROAD_SAFETY_POLICY_.asp

Israeli Tech Company Helps Companies Diagnose, Treat Bad Driving

In response to the millions of dollars companies spend each year on repairs caused by crashes involving their employees on the road, an Israeli tech company has developed a new system to diagnose and treat bad driving. SafetyCenter is a small stand-alone black-box device that sits on the vehicle's dashboard. Unconnected to any of the vehicle's systems, SafetyCenter uses sensors to monitor every move the vehicle makes by measuring the forces of the car. Each move is identified as one of approximately one hundred different maneuvers in its database. The software then produces a report of the driving behavior, which can be sent electronically to fleet managers. The company is currently working on a feature that will detail how much bad driving could cost over a closed period of time. Read the full article at

<http://www.israel21c.org/bin/en.jsp?enDispWho=Articles%5EI877&enSearchQueryID=11&enPage=BlankPage&enDisplay=view&enDispWhat=object&enVersion=0&enZone=Technology&>

South Africa Distributes Disposable Cameras to Catch Bad Drivers

Several thousand "goodie bags" will be passed out to motorists at toll plazas as part of a new road safety campaign by the Road Safety Directorate. Funded by the Road Traffic Inspectorate, the goodie bags contain a water bottle, a key ring, and a disposable camera, which they can use to photograph fellow motorists breaking the law. The campaign hopes to encourage drivers to make sensible decisions about their driving behaviors and that the cameras will be used to catch motorists who commit serious offenses. Read the full article at

<http://www.dailynews.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=500&fArticleId=2359233>